FIRST COMICS™
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E-MAN™

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Staton

%FIRST COMICS,
1014 DAVIS STREET,
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS
60201

Yo People,

While the last few issues have been a refreshing break from the heavy-handed satire, there's such a thing as being too subtle, ya' know? I wonder how many people even caught the yok about using nuclear-powered armor to mine coal? Let's have some more hit-'em-over-the-head-with-it humor in there, too. (Elfquest, huh? Well ...)

Dian Hardison
7215 Ralph #6
Norfolk, VA 23505

Elfquest, huh? Well, I guess I'll have to go ahead and do it — issue #17, ready or not ...

Dear Mike, Paul, and Joe,

Well .... E-Man #11 brought the "Barrentown" story and the secret of Nova's past to a successful (if not totally satisfying) conclusion. Never has so much gotten wrapped up so quickly in so few pages.

I'm glad you gave Nova a past, but I'm not really sure if Nova's father died at the end of the issue. If he did, Nova seemed to take it rather well. If he didn't die, it is hard to understand why E-Man just stood there and watched him die. There are still questions remaining about Nova's mother who "split when she was ten." I hope you build on these in future issues. It would also be interesting (perhaps even mind-boggling) to see a bit of Mauser's past.

Although the quality of issues of E-Man has fluctuated wildly in the past several issues, I'm very glad to see E-Man is still hanging in there. I am and will continue to be an E-Man fan.

T. E. Pouncey
2356 Mascot
Wichita, KA 67214

I'm not sure the world is really ready to deal with the facts of Mauser's past. But until then — who was Manny and just what did Simpson do in Newark?

Dear First Folks,

I'm sorry that letter-writer T. E. Pouncey considers references to complex story continuity "pap." Pap or no pap, it's hard for me to see how a comic with three-dimensional characters can avoid growing more complex — and, yes, more difficult — over the course of its run. Even E-Man, which could probably succeed (though in a different way) if its stories were as disjointed and static as those in an Archie comic — even whacky E-Man is accumulating a history.

Is that a bad thing? Well, it does seem sometimes that DC and Marvel are showing signs of exhaustion. Maybe, simply by giving a comic character all the equippage of a real life — feelings, a past, friends who grow and change — you also condemn him to a finite life span. Maybe, as you suggest, the other guys did it wrong, and First will do better. I'll reserve judgment until I've had a chance to read E-Man #200.

I will say this: it was the "richness and complexity" of the E-Man series to date that made the death of Nova's father so moving. Now and forevermore Nova — whom we know as a character — is an orphan whose father once was a mine engineer. You can't do a story five years hence in which her father is, say, a banker, and is still alive. When it's germane, future readers may have to be informed of how and why her father died. That's a limitation, but the limitations are far greater for an easy read in which nothing confusing or complicated ever happens.

Mike Vaughn
1316 N. 3rd St.
Bismarck, ND 58501

Dear Energetic Folk,

This may seem like somewhat of a peripheral concern, but please bear with me, as it made rather a great impression on me. "It" was the cover to number eleven of your venerable title, and to be more specific, the coloring thereof. Who did it? Wendy Fiore? Let me say that it was awesome, spectacular, and psychedelic, though subtle in its rendition. The juxtaposition of the electric-blue and purple slug against Our Hero's costume produced a rather fluorescent effect, especially when set against the rather more subdued coloring of the human characters' faces. I am wowed and awesomed out, etcetera, so please, let the colorist of that cover remain anonymous no longer, okay?

The Mad Gumby
685 Main St.
Shrewsbury, MA 01545

As have been all the covers on First's run of **E-Man** *to date, the "Slug" cover was colored by the rather fluorescent Mr.* **Bruce Patterson,** *our Production Coordinator emeritus. That particular cover was one of several we have done using full painting techniques on "blue lines" and photo separated, in contrast to the hand separation process we employ on all our interior art, and initially used on all our covers. Going to photo separations is something of an experiment for us and we are occasionally rather surprised with the results.*

NEXT ISSUE: Somebody gets shot again. Somebody dies. Somebody escapes. Somebody gets captured by elf-like interlopers.

— Joe Staton

Rick Obadiah, Publisher

Mike Gold, Managing Editor
Joe Staton, Art Director
Rick Oliver, Associate Editor
Alex Wald,
Production Coordinator

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Business Manager
Ralph C. Musicant,
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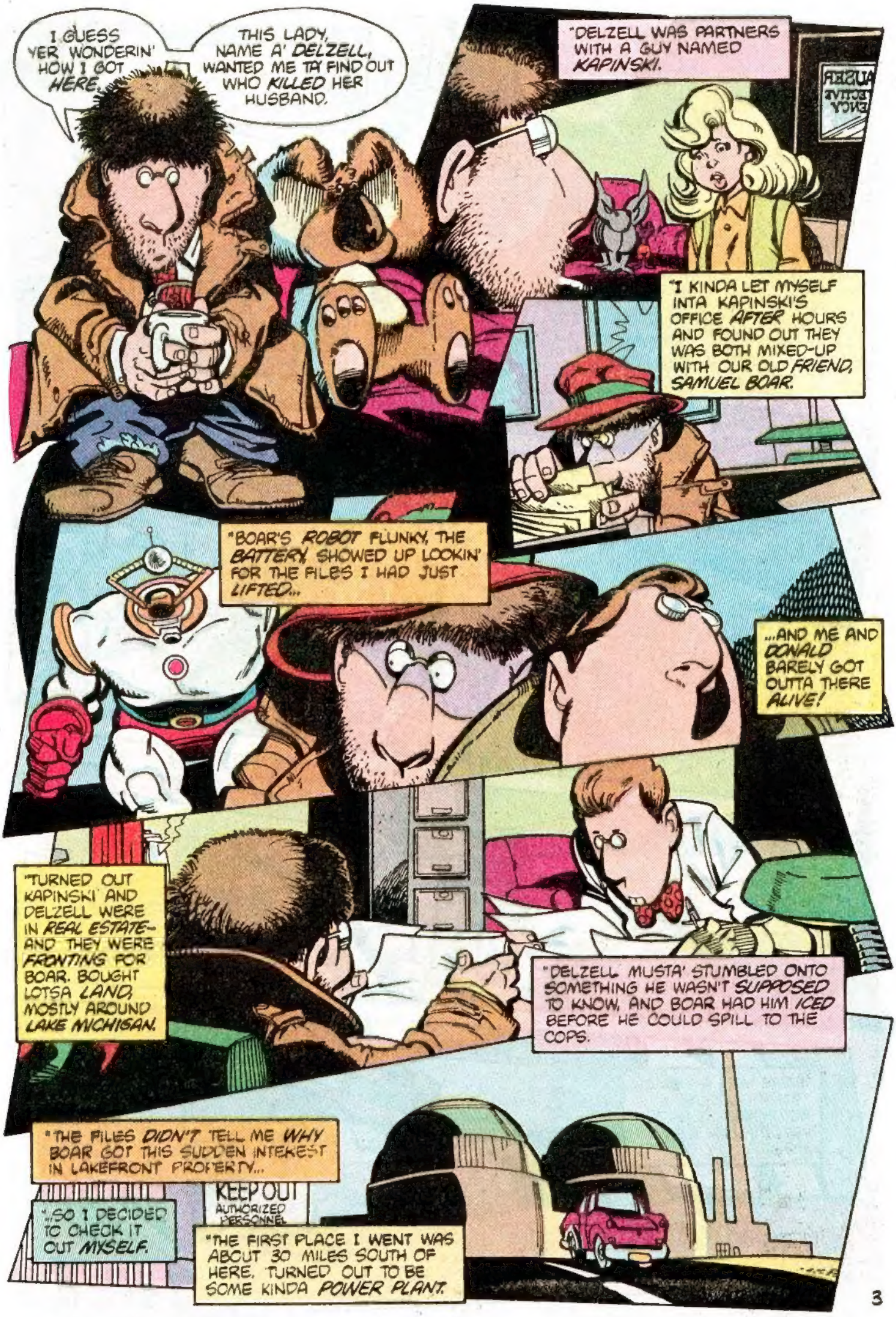
A FIRST COMICS PUBLISHING PRODUCTION

E-MAN
created by
NICOLA CUTI and JOE STATON
KOALA BEARS ARE NOCTURNAL ANIMALS--SENSITIVE TO THE SOUND OF THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT... LIKE FALLING BODIES.
NOVA KANE WASN'T EXPECTING COMPANY. IN FACT, SHE WASN'T EVEN AWAKE...
BUT IT'S HARD TO SLEEP WITH A KOALA BEAR WHISTLING IN YOUR EAR.
written and pencilled by
JOE STATON
inked by
RICK BURCHETT
lettered by
KEN BRUZENAK
colored by
WENDY FIORE
edited by
MIKE GOLD
ALEC!
FAT MAN'S FURY!

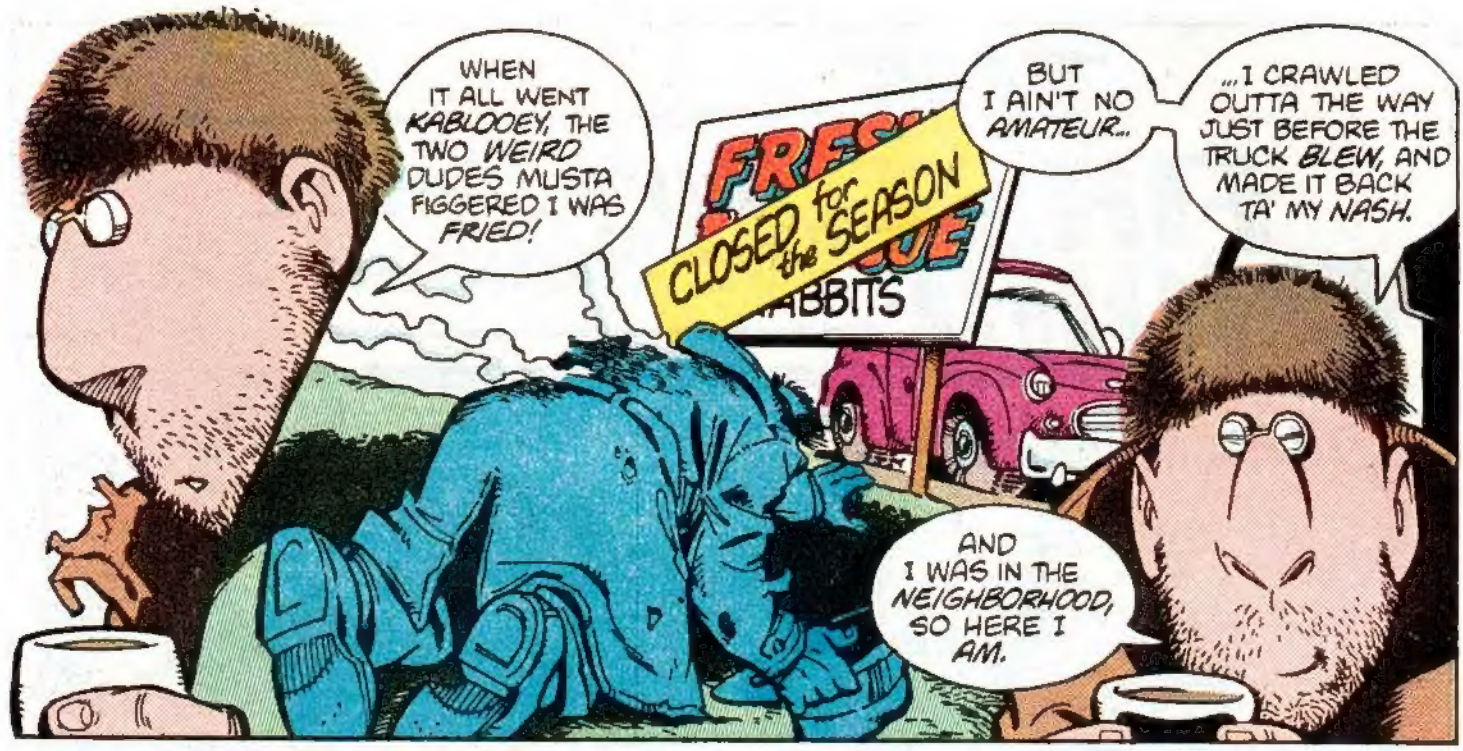
ALEC!
NOVA, WHAT'S WRONG?
WHOLE WHEA
THAT'S WRONG!
MAUSER!
WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
I DON'T KNOW. BUT HE LOOKS HURT.
I THOUGHT WE WERE RID OF HIM!
E-M
MIKE, CAN YOU HEAR ME? WHAT HAPPENED?
HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE IN NEW YORK!
HI, TRONN.
HI RED.
HOW'S LIFE IN THE WINDY CITY?


I GUESS YER WONDERIN' HOW I GOT HERE.
THIS LADY, NAME A' DELZELL, WANTED ME TA' FIND OUT WHO KILLED HER HUSBAND.
"DELZELL WAS PARTNERS WITH A GUY NAMED KAPINSKI.
"I KINDA LET MYSELF INTA KAPINSKI'S OFFICE AFTER HOURS AND FOUND OUT THEY WAS BOTH MIXED-UP WITH OUR OLD FRIEND, SAMUEL BOAR.
"BOAR'S ROBOT FLUNKY, THE BATTERY, SHOWED UP LOOKIN' FOR THE FILES I HAD JUST LIFTED...
...AND ME AND DONALD BARELY GOT OUTTA THERE ALIVE!
"TURNED OUT KAPINSKI AND DELZELL WERE IN REAL ESTATE— AND THEY WERE FRONTING FOR BOAR. BOUGHT LOTSA LAND, MOSTLY AROUND LAKE MICHIGAN.
"DELZELL MUSTA' STUMBLED ONTO SOMETHING HE WASN'T SUPPOSED TO KNOW, AND BOAR HAD HIM ICED BEFORE HE COULD SPILL TO THE COPS.
"THE FILES DIDN'T TELL ME WHY BOAR GOT THIS SUDDEN INTEREST IN LAKEFRONT PROPERTY...
"SO I DECIDED TO CHECK IT OUT MYSELF.
KEEP OUT
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL
"THE FIRST PLACE I WENT WAS ABOUT 30 MILES SOUTH OF HERE. TURNED OUT TO BE SOME KINDA POWER PLANT.

IT WAS A NUCLEAR PLANT--BUT IT WASN'T WORKIN'
FROM THE LOOK OF THINGS, CONSTRUCTION GOT STOPPED BEFORE THE THING GOT DONE.
KEEP OUT
CONCRETE
CONCRETE
"I DIDN'T THINK ANYBODY WOULD MIND IF I TOOK A LOOK AROUND..."
HEY, WHO'S THAT IN THERE?!
GUARDS!
"THEY LOOKED REAL DETERMINED IN THEIR JUMP-SUITS AN' ALL.
"I DISTRACTED THEIR ATTENTION WITH A COUPLA 9MM's...
"THERE WAS A PICK-UP TRUCK OUTSIDE. I HOTWIRED IT AND HEADED FER THE ROAD.
"I FIGGERED I'D OUTRUN 'EM."

BUT YOU CAN NEVER PLAN FER THE UNEXPECTED...
...A COUPLE OF 'EM WERE WAITIN' FOR ME...
"AND I HAD A FEELIN' THESE TWO MEANT BUSINESS!
"I TRIED TO DODGE 'EM, BUT IT SEEMED LIKE SOMETHING ELSE HAD HOLD A' THE WHEEL...
"THE BIG GUY JUST STARED AT ME WITH HIS BUG EYES, AND THE TRUCK FLIPPED OVER!
"BLIPS OF LIGHT SHOT OUTTA GIZMOS ON THE DAME'S HANDS...
"AND THE PICK-UP CAUGHT FIRE!
"I MUSTA GONE OUT FER A COUPLA SECONDS."

KABOOM!
YOU CAN RELAX NOW, SYNAPTON! OUR WORK HERE IS FINISHED.
AS YOU INSTRUCTED, MR. BOAR, THE INTRUDER WAS... STOPPED.
HE WAS KILLED WHEN THE TRUCK EXPLODED.
VERY GOOD, PHOTON. YOU AND SYNAPTON HAVE DONE WELL.
MAUSER HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT IRRITATION TO ME.
IT WOULD NOT DO TO HAVE HIM INTERFERE AT THIS POINT.
NO, NOT AT ALL.
MSA
SPACE SHUTTL
RESERVA
CONFIRM

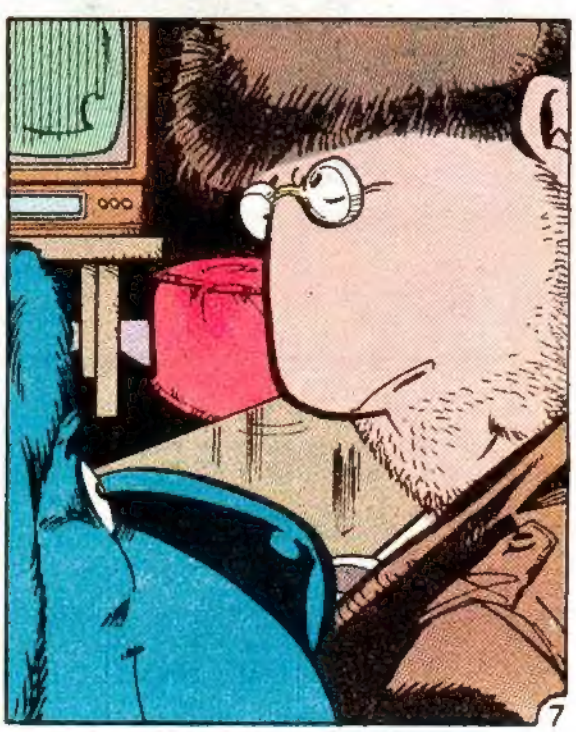

WHEN IT ALL WENT KABLOOEY, THE TWO WEIRD DUDES MUSTA FIGGERED I WAS FRIED!
CLOSED for the SEASON
BUT I AIN'T NO AMATEUR...
...I CRAWLED OUTTA THE WAY JUST BEFORE THE TRUCK BLEW, AND MADE IT BACK TA' MY NASH.
AND I WAS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, SO HERE I AM.

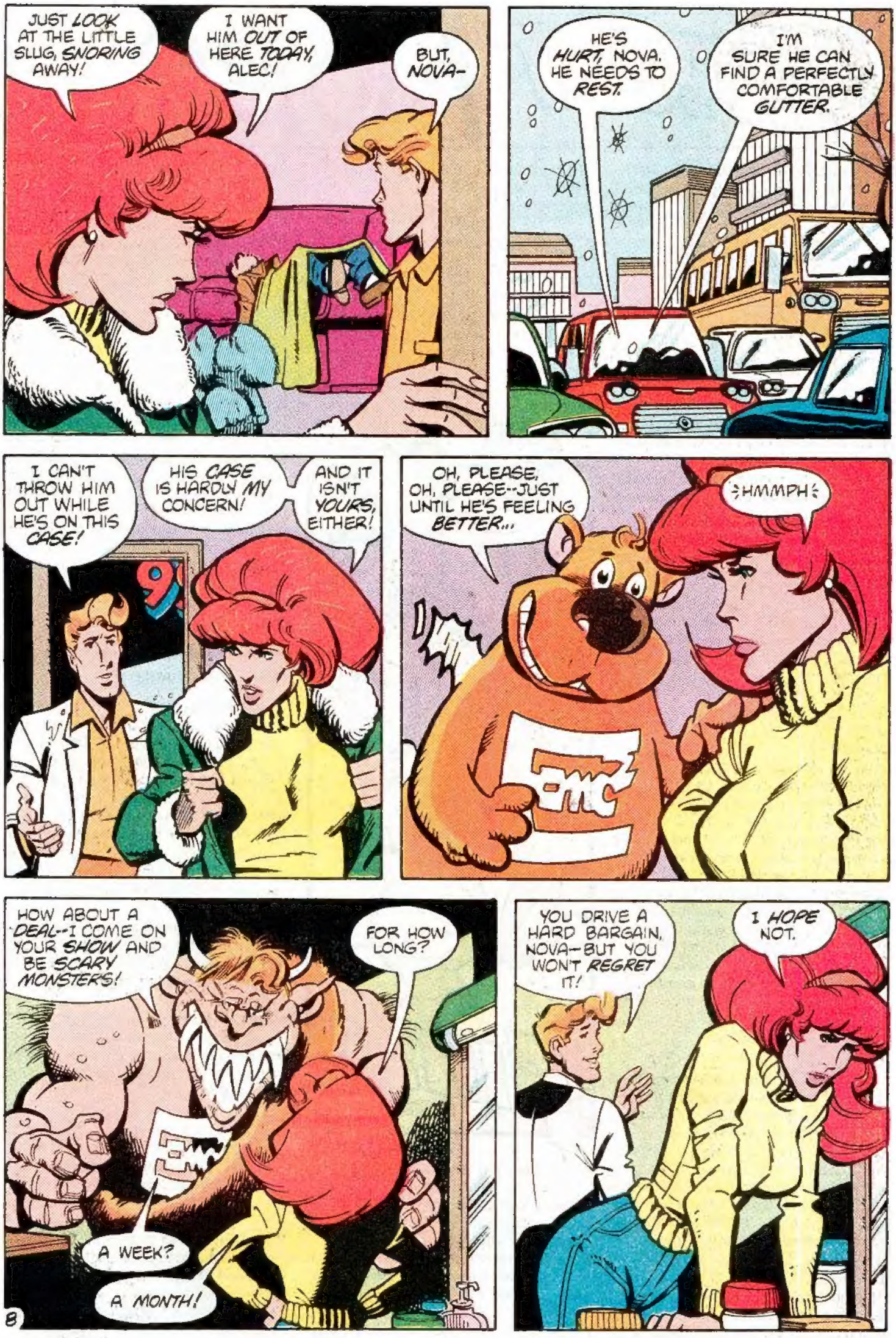
HOW'RE YOU DOIN', TRONN? YOU WORKIN' YET?

WELL, NO, NOT REALLY-I JUST...

ALEC!

DON'T YOU SEE WHAT HE'S DOING?
HE GETS IN TOO DEEP, AND HE COMES LOOKING FOR YOU TO BAIL HIM OUT!
BUT, NOVA--




JUST LOOK AT THE LITTLE SLUG, SNORING AWAY!
I WANT HIM OUT OF HERE TODAY, ALEC!
BUT, NOVA-
HE'S HURT, NOVA. HE NEEDS TO REST.
I'M SURE HE CAN FIND A PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE GUTTER.
I CAN'T THROW HIM OUT WHILE HE'S ON THIS CASE!
HIS CASE IS HARDLY MY CONCERN!
AND IT ISN'T YOURS, EITHER!
OH, PLEASE, OH, PLEASE--JUST UNTIL HE'S FEELING BETTER...
HMMPH
HOW ABOUT A DEAL--I COME ON YOUR SHOW AND BE SCARY MONSTERS!
FOR HOW LONG?
A WEEK?
A MONTH!
YOU DRIVE A HARD BARGAIN, NOVA--BUT YOU WON'T REGRET IT!
I HOPE NOT.

FIRST NOTES

STILL ANOTHER LETTER COLUMN?

We've been getting a great deal of mail that either covers our entire line or is in response to issues raised here in First Notes. I thank you for all the feedback — it is tremendously important, and I've been meaning to run some of it in this column. Which, oddly enough, is just what I'm doing now.

Dear Mike:

You hit the nail on the head. Too many parents are quick to blame "outside influences" for their own inadequacies in raising their children. And as a parent, I resent others who try to dictate what my kids can see, read or do.

As to video games ... well, my son introduced me to the fun of playing against the computer and I have introduced him to the fun of reading and collecting comics. Our hobbies have overlapped and brought us closer together.

I have been collecting comics since the Sixties, Mike, and this is the first time I can remember reading a real editorial on a comic's editorial page. You are to be commended.

Phil White
Lake Forest, CA

Dear Mike,

Who is Notary Sojac? Why don't you intend for your comics to be sold to mynas? Do you actually think someone would take a copy of Mars #2 and machine wash it? Why is Jon Sable, Freelance sanitized for our protection? Admittedly, American Flagg! was an all-American comic in its debut, but why were all thoughts I had while reading the first issue of E-Man copyrighted? And who wants a dolphin-skin coat, anyway?

What goes with the business box in the lower left corner of your inside front covers? Is there really going to be a short quiz later?

Brad Keefauver
Morton, IL

The indicia gags are the work of Associate Editor (and **Warp***-editor) Rick Oliver, who appears to be overreacting to his completely normal childhood.*

And, for the record, "notary sojac" was the running non-sequitur in Bill Holman's wonderful Sunday comic strip, Smokey Stover. If you haven't seen the strip, check it out in the Smithsonian Book of Newspaper Comic Strips.

Dear Mike,

I think First Comics is the best thing to happen to the comics industry since Action Comics #1. Since the appearance of First Comics and Pacific Comics, the overall quality of all comics companies has improved.

Michael A. Amarello
Fall River, Ma

Dear Mike:

I think you're on to something here. I hold in my hands, as it were, the First Comics line. I like your books very much — quite an improvement over comics in general.

However, I must caution you. Remember the mid-70s and a comics

group known as Atlas/Seaboard? They, too, had marvelous artists and writers, exciting stories and art, as well as a general grasp of what comics readers wanted. They folded.

I would not like to see this happen to First. After American Flagg!, take time to rest ... let the comics establish themselves ... get a following, and then hit us again with another batch. I feel First is going to go a long way ... we're ready, but will you be?

Charles B. Cockett, Jr.
Cheyenne, WY

Atlas/Seaboard was, in my opinion, a classic example of the right idea at the wrong time. Had they gone into business five years later when the direct sales distribution network was on stronger ground, and had they been able to avoid newsstand distribution, I firmly believe they'd be around today.

Still, I have to point out that no single Atlas title went beyond four issues ... and each of our books have gone well beyond that. We did take a rest after **Mars** *(instead of Flagg), introducing only our initial graphic novel, Beowulf, in the six months following* **Mars** *#1. But our next new monthly will come out in early April, and we've got two more books set for summer release.*

Please, keep your letters coming — both to this column and to our individual titles. We'll run another First Notes lettercol before too long.

— Mike Gold

FIRST IN FEBRUARY

American Flagg #9: "In Town To Do Some Business ... With a Big Iron on his Hip!", the conclusion to State of the Union. **Chaykin's** got Flagg up a pole, and just wait 'till you see who salutes!

E-Man #15: The return of Samuel Boar! The shooting of Michael Mauser! The menace of The Battery! **Joe Staton's** made sure E-Man's getting a hot welcome in Chicago town tonight!

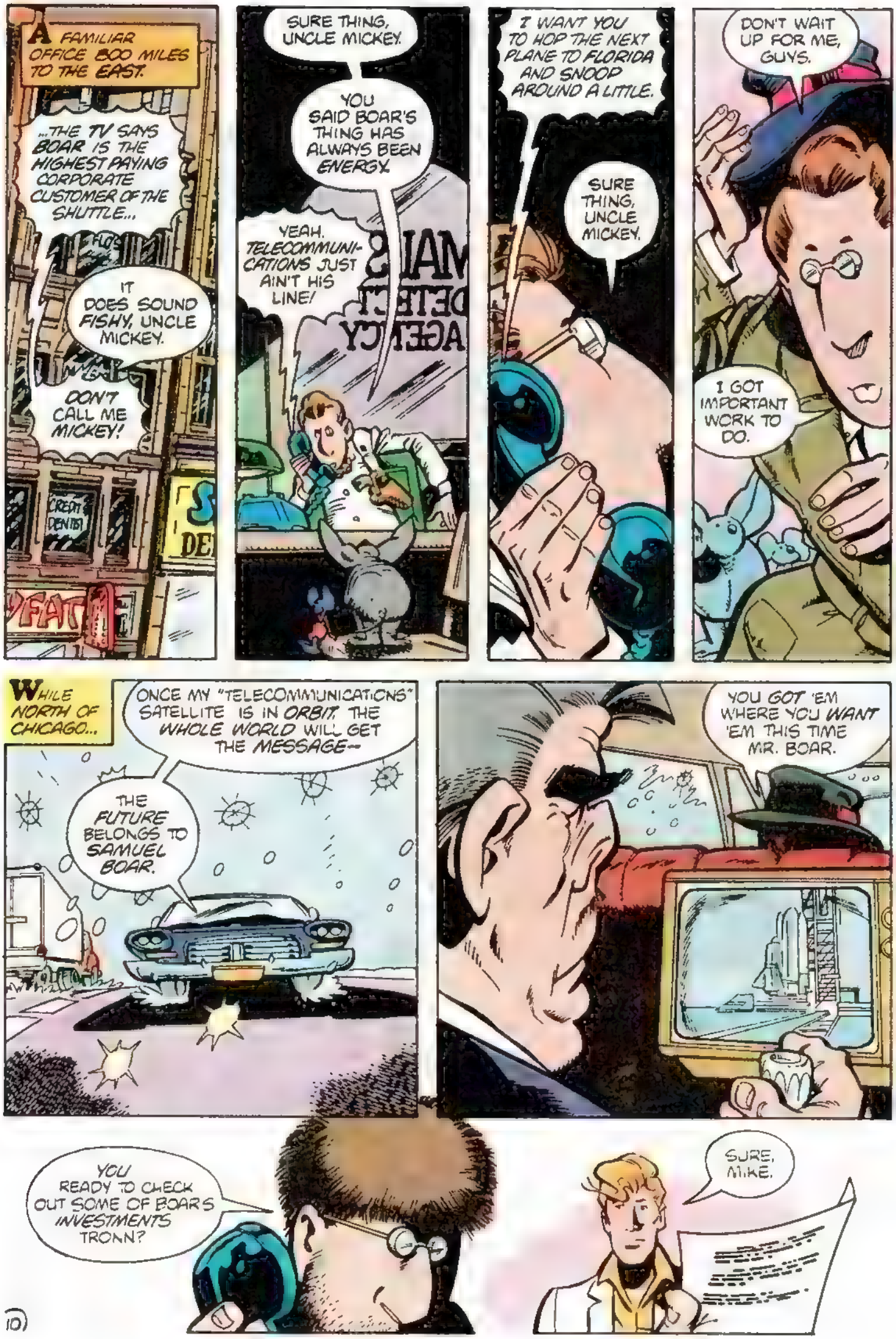
Jon Sable, Freelance #13: "MIA — Conclusion." **Mike Grell's** got Jon Sable and crew inside Vietnam — now, can he get them out in one piece?

Mars #6: Who really runs the red planet? If you haven't checked out this ground-breaking monthly yet, "Faith" is the place to start! Plus: the wind-up to the first Black Flame epic!

Starslayer #17: Torin's got to bust out of jail, and Grimjack's hip-deep in killer bunnies! Have **John Ostrander** and **Timothy Truman** lost their minds, or just their inhibitions?

Warp Special #3 featuring Chaos — Prince of Madness: "Four Figures on a Darkened Stage," the sequel to the critically acclaimed first **Warp Special.** Story by **Peter Gillis,** art by **George Freeman.**

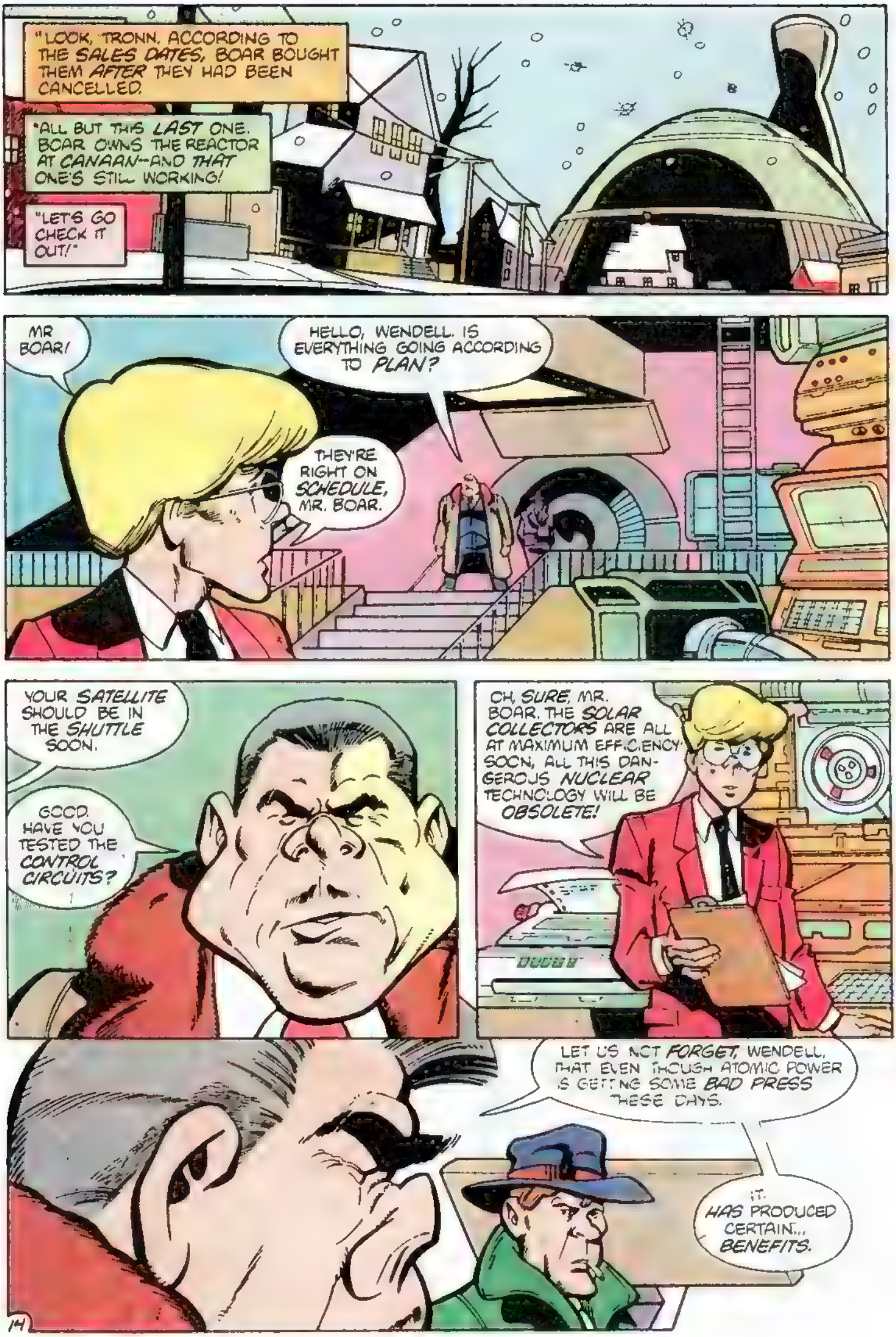
HEY, MIKE, NOVA SAYS IT'S OKAY TO STAY HERE UNTIL YOU--
UH, MIKE...
HI, TRONN. YOU WANT SOME BREAKFAST.
KORN FLAKES
BREAD
NOVA ISNT GOING TO LIKE THIS MESS.
MESS?
...AS THE SPACE SHUTTLE REBOUNDER IS BEING READIED BEHIND ME...
NO SWEAT.
I'LL JUST KICK IT ALL BEHIND THE SOFA.
MAYBE WE SHOULD GET TO WORK ON YOUR CASE.
YEAH, SURE. I--
...SOON TO BE LOADED ABOARD IS BOAR INDUSTRIES' FIRST TELECOMMUNICATIONS SATELLITE...
HUH...?
!


A FAMILIAR OFFICE 800 MILES TO THE EAST.
...THE TV SAYS BOAR IS THE HIGHEST PAYING CORPORATE CUSTOMER OF THE SHUTTLE...
IT DOES SOUND FISHY, UNCLE MICKEY.
DON'T CALL ME MICKEY!
SURE THING, UNCLE MICKEY.
YOU SAID BOAR'S THING HAS ALWAYS BEEN ENERGY.
YEAH. TELECOMMUNICATIONS JUST AIN'T HIS LINE!
I WANT YOU TO HOP THE NEXT PLANE TO FLORIDA AND SNOOP AROUND A LITTLE.
SURE THING, UNCLE MICKEY.
DON'T WAIT UP FOR ME, GUYS.
I GOT IMPORTANT WORK TO DO.
WHILE NORTH OF CHICAGO...
ONCE MY "TELECOMMUNICATIONS" SATELLITE IS IN ORBIT, THE WHOLE WORLD WILL GET THE MESSAGE--
THE FUTURE BELONGS TO SAMUEL BOAR.
YOU GOT 'EM WHERE YOU WANT 'EM THIS TIME MR. BOAR.
YOU READY TO CHECK OUT SOME OF BOAR'S INVESTMENTS TRONN?
SURE, MIKE.

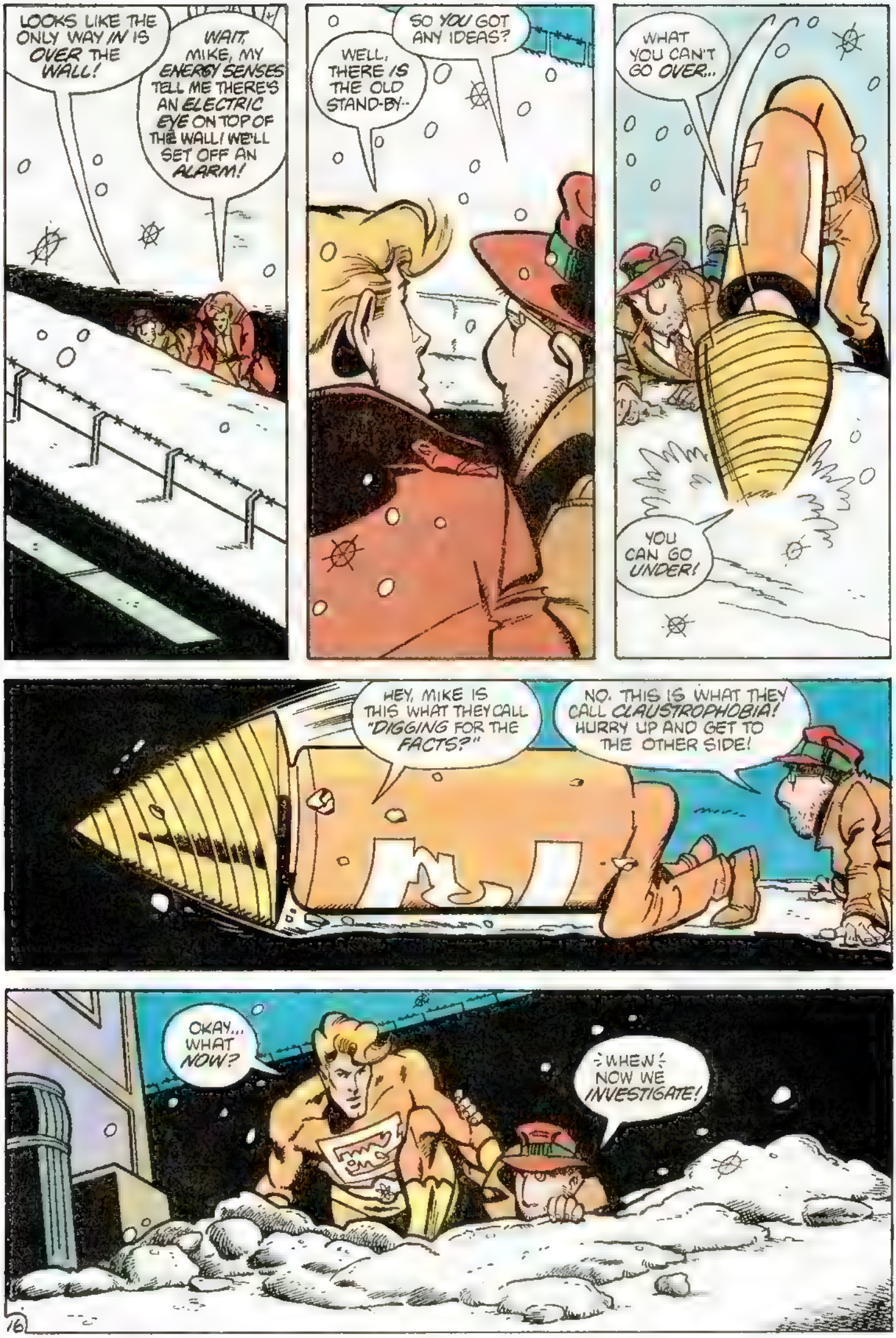
SCENIC MICHIGAN.
HEY, MISTER, YOU EVER GOING TO FINISH THIS PLACE?
HUH-?
CONSTRUCTION
HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE?
AIN'T NOBODY BUT THE CREW ALLOWED IN HERE.
ALLENDE BRAZILIAN COFFEES
THAT'S IT TRONN. JUST KEEP HIM DISTRACTED.
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, BLONDIE.
SOMEBODY IS IN THE CONSTRUCTION TRAILER.

I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING.
I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAW!
YOU JUST STAY RIGHT-- HUH?
GUARDS!
THERE WAS A SKINNY BLONDE GUY HERE--
--AND ANOTHER GUY IN THE TRAILER!
NOBODY IN HERE, BOSS.
THEY WERE HERE.
KEEP LOOKING--THEY'VE GOT TO BE HERE SOMEWHERE!
CONCRETE

WHERE DO THEY GET ALL THOSE JUMPSUITS, MIKE?
DUNNO. FREDERICK'S OF CLEVELAND MEBBE.
FIND ANYTHING?
SORT OF...
I GOT THIS COMPUTER THING WITH BOAR'S NAME ON IT...
BUT I AIN'T GOT NO COMPUTER TO PLAY IT ON--
AND I CAN'T RUN ONE ANYWAY.
HMMMM...
DISCS RECORD MAGNETICALLY. MAGNETISM IS ENERGY— SO...
FILE NAME: BOAR.
TAKE NOTES, MIKE.
OKAY, I'M GETTING IT TRONN.
LET ME SEE THE LIST MIKE.
I JUST SAW A SPECIAL ON 20/20 ABOUT NUCLEAR ENERGY.
THE GUY WHO LOOKS LIKE FREDDIE PRINZE SAID THE MID-WEST HAD THE MOST PARTIALLY COMPLETED, THEN CANCELLED REACTORS...
... AND THEY'RE ALL ON THIS LIST!


"LOOK, TRONN. ACCORDING TO THE SALES DATES, BOAR BOUGHT THEM AFTER THEY HAD BEEN CANCELLED.
"ALL BUT THIS LAST ONE. BOAR OWNS THE REACTOR AT CANAAN--AND THAT ONE'S STILL WORKING!
"LET'S GO CHECK IT OUT!"
MR BOAR!
HELLO, WENDELL. IS EVERYTHING GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN?
THEY'RE RIGHT ON SCHEDULE, MR. BOAR.
YOUR SATELLITE SHOULD BE IN THE SHUTTLE SOON.
GOOD. HAVE YOU TESTED THE CONTROL CIRCUITS?
OH, SURE, MR. BOAR. THE SOLAR COLLECTORS ARE ALL AT MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY SOON, ALL THIS DANGEROUS NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY WILL BE OBSOLETE!
LET US NOT FORGET, WENDELL, THAT EVEN THOUGH ATOMIC POWER IS GETTING SOME BAD PRESS THESE DAYS.
IT HAS PRODUCED CERTAIN... BENEFITS.

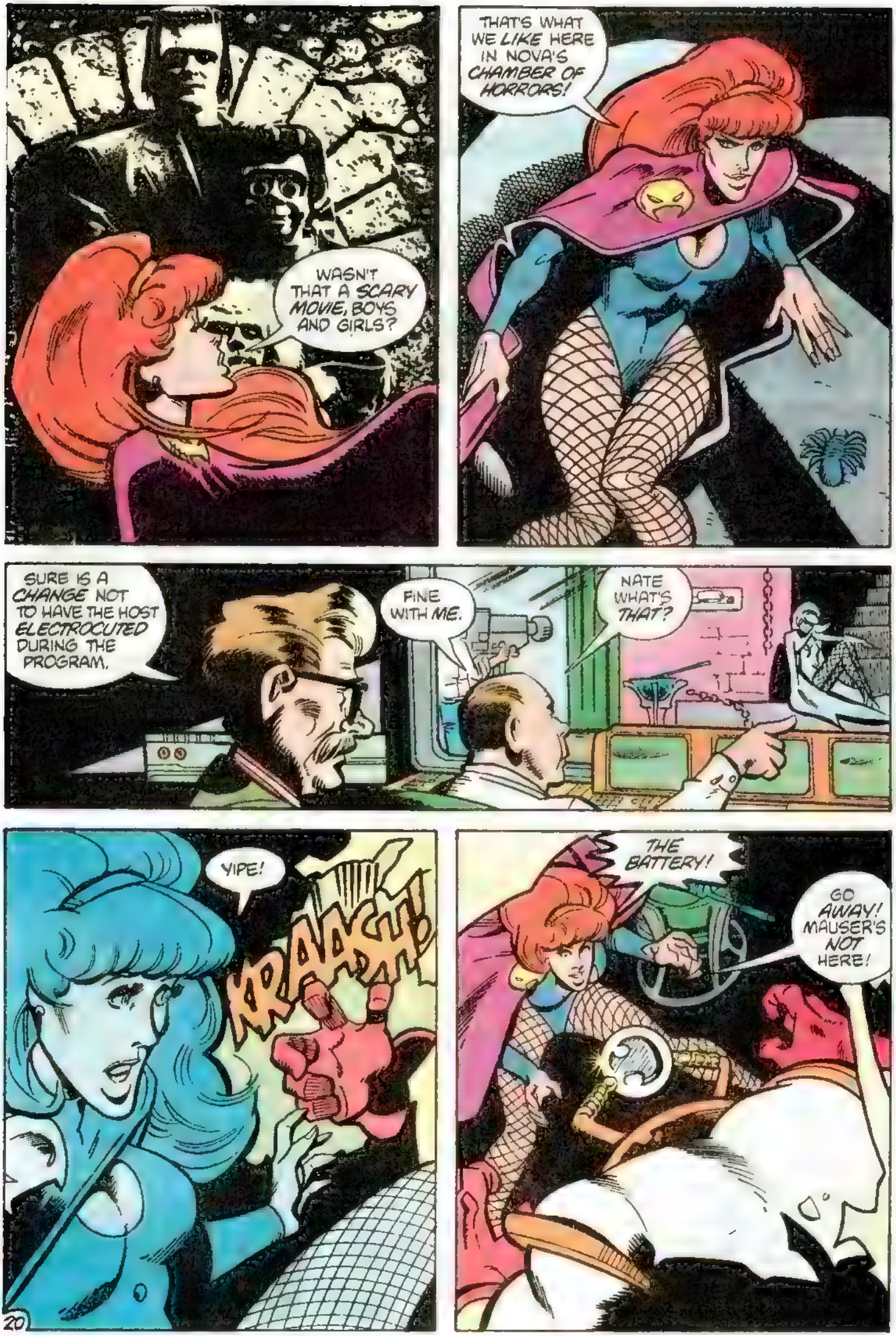
OH, YES, WENDELL, THERE WERE BENEFITS--WEREN'T THERE, MR. BOAR?
BE CAREFUL, PHOTON...
YES. IT'S ALWAYS WISE TO BE CAREFUL. MAX AND CHRISTINE WEREN'T... CAREFUL, WERE THEY, MR. BOAR?
"THOSE WERE OUR NAMES, WENDELL, WHEN WE WERE PART OF BOAR INDUSTRIES' POST-GRAD RESEARCH PROGRAM...
"JUST LIKE YOU WENDELL...
"EXCEPT THE PROGRAM WAS NUCLEAR THEN...
"AND THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT!"
"WE LIVED-ONLY BOAR'S TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS US TO LIVE-EVEN NOW.
"MAX'S EXPOSED BRAIN DEVELOPED MASSIVE TELEKINETIC ABILITIES..
"I ABSORB SOLAR ENERGY UNCONTROLLABLY-AND MUST RELEASE IT PERIODICALLY-OR THE OVERLOAD WILL KILL ME!
"MR. BOAR FINDS US USEFUL.
"WENDELL, BE CAREFUL OF BEING FOUND USEFUL BY MR. BOAR!"


LOOKS LIKE THE ONLY WAY IN IS OVER THE WALL!
WAIT, MIKE, MY ENERGY SENSES TELL ME THERE'S AN ELECTRIC EYE ON TOP OF THE WALL! WE'LL SET OFF AN ALARM!
WELL, THERE IS THE OLD STAND-BY--
SO YOU GOT ANY IDEAS?
WHAT YOU CAN'T GO OVER..
YOU CAN GO UNDER!
HEY, MIKE IS THIS WHAT THEY CALL "DIGGING FOR THE FACTS?"
NO. THIS IS WHAT THEY CALL CLAUSTROPHOBIA! HURRY UP AND GET TO THE OTHER SIDE!
OKAY... WHAT NOW?
WHEW! NOW WE INVESTIGATE!

MR. BOAR--!
WHAT IS IT, SIMPSON?
LOOK AT THE MONITOR!
THERE'S BEEN A SECURITY BREACH!
E-MAN --AND MAUSER!
AND YOU SAID MAUSER HAD BEEN KILLED!
BUT WE WERE SO SURE-
MY LASER SQUAD CAN HANDLE THEM!
YES. KILLING IS A... NEW PROFESSION FOR PHOTON...
BUT YOU'RE A PROFESSIONAL, MR. SIMPSON-I EXPECT MUCH MORE FROM YOU!
LOOK OUT, MIKE!
WHOOM!
I'M ONE STEP AHEAD OF YA, TRONN!

THAT'S ONE DOWN!
ARGH!
BLAM!
COME ON, MIKE!
WOOM
YOW! THAT WAS CLOSE!
MAYBE THEY NEED A MIRROR TO SHOW THEM THE LIGHT!
ZZZZT
WHUDD
PHOTON, SYNAPTON! GET IN THERE AND RECTIFY YOUR PREVIOUS ERROR!
BUT MR BCAR--
FOOLS! FORTUNATELY I STILL HAVE MY BACK-UP--
COME IN, BATTERY!

CAPE KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, STAGING GROUND FOR THE COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF NEAR-EARTH SPACE.
IT IS A MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION, ESPECIALLY ON LAUNCH DAYS.
BILL DANA, WON'T YOU PLEASE COME HOME?
LAUNCHES ARE ALSO MAJOR MEDIA EVENTS.
I DIDN'T REALIZE THE HERALD-TRIBUNE HAD A SCHENECTADY OFFICE...
PRESS
NOT TO MENTION PUBLIC RELATIONS OPPORTUNITIES.
OUR OLD COMEDIANS-IN-SPACE PROGRAM IS PROUD TO PRESENT...
I'M IN LUCK-- THEY HAVEN'T LOADED THE STUFF INTO THE SHUTTLE YET.
BUT SAMUEL BOAR LEAVES LITTLE TO LUCK.
TAKE CARE OF THE GUY SNOOPING AROUND MR. BOAR'S MODULE--
--MAKE IT LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT.
HOLD
19


WASN'T THAT A SCARY MOVIE, BOYS AND GIRLS?
THAT'S WHAT WE LIKE HERE IN NOVA'S CHAMBER OF HORRORS!
SURE IS A CHANGE NOT TO HAVE THE HOST ELECTROCUTED DURING THE PROGRAM.
FINE WITH ME.
NATE WHAT'S THAT?
YIPE!
KRAAK!
THE BATTERY!
GO AWAY! MAUSER'S NOT HERE!

YOU GOT THE WRONG PERSON!
I AM OUT OF THE SUPERVILLAINS' VICTIM BUSINESS!
WHACK!
WOW! LOOK AT THAT!
WHERE'D SHE GET THAT THING?
I'VE GOT MY OWN LIFE!
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOU!
OR BOAR!
OR MAUSER!
LET ME GO!
WOW! A LITTLE HARD ON THE SET, BUT WHAT A FINISH!

UH-OH. IT'S THE DAME WITH THE ENERGY GIZMOS!
AND THAT MEANS THE GUY WITH THE BRAIN-UNDER GLASS IS AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE...
UHH--! LIKE OVER HERE!
IT'S ALL DONE WITH MIRRORS--I JUST BOUNCE YOUR BURSTS BACK AT YOU!
BEEP!! BEEP!!
FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DOES YOU!
MY PHOTOVOLTAIC BODY MERELY REABSORBS THE ENERGY--
--AND I RELEASE IT--AS I MUST!

THE ORIGINS OF "INDEPENDENT" COMICS

PART 5

by CHARLES MEYERSON

Dave Sim has a mission: "My priority," he says, "is to make sure that every month until March 2003 there will be a new 20-page segment of this 6,000-page story."

That wasn't always the case. For one thing, his *Cerebus the Aardvark* began as a bi-monthly comic. And before the first issue appeared, late in 1977, his commitment was much more limited. In the words of his publisher (and former wife) Deni, "We said, 'Why don't we do three or four issues? If we've lost money by then, we can ditch the whole project.'"

IN 1976, DAVE SIM was a 20 year-old high-school drop-out doing a lot of what he calls "cartooning for money — doing tire ads," and working at the "Now and Then Books" comics shop in Kitchener, Ontario.

Not far away, 25 year-old office-worker/dancer/hamburger-slinger Denise Loubert was looking to launch a writing career: "A couple of friends and I were trying to form a writing group. I didn't read comics. Then, my brother picked up a copy of *Dark Fantasy* (a collection of illustrated fiction assembled by the late Gene Day). I said, 'Why don't we do one of these?'"

She went to "Now and Then," hoping to sell a fanzine she hadn't published yet. She met Dave, who had done some of the illustration for *Dark Fantasy*. He agreed to contribute to her project.

THEY CAME UP with a company name, "Aardvark-Vanaheim Press," and a mascot — an aardvark, of course — whom they named after their magazine: *Cerebus*. It was to have been Cerberus, after the three-headed dog of Greek mythology, but Deni misspelled the logo.

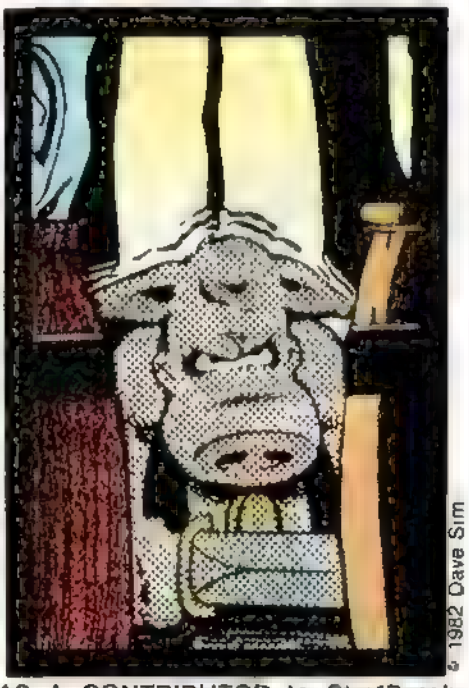
Unfortunately, *Cerebus* the anthology went the way of many projects back then: "We sent it out to be printed," Deni says, "and the guy just took our money and disappeared."

They never published the anthology, but her friendship with Dave endured.

"Deni had a regular job," Dave says. "There was someone basically supporting me by feeding me and being emotionally supportive as well. After we started living together, it became obvious that comic books were what I wanted to do."

DENI TOOK THE ROLE of publisher: "He needed somebody who could present it in an unbiased manner to the distributors. Also, I had a basic idea that artists shouldn't have to deal with mundane aspects: who's got their checks in, how are we going to get them out of people who didn't, and what box of books got lost this month."

"Even as a fan," Dave says, "I knew I preferred any comic that said it came out bimonthly and then *came out* bimonthly . . . to any book that maybe was of better quality but didn't come out when promised." Irregularly published books "just don't feel like the bandwagon most fans are looking for."



© 1982 Dave Sim

AS A CONTRIBUTOR to *Star*Reach* (profiled in part two of this series) and as an editor for *Orb* magazine in Toronto (as Dave puts it, "a fanzine trying to do it professionally"), he was convinced interior color didn't work for non-newsstand comics.

"*Orb* tried color, even though it didn't work for *Star*Reach*. Basically, it didn't sell more copies and it wasn't necessarily more attractive."

So Dave and Deni took the mascot of their ill-fated anthology and made him the star of a black-and-white comic book.

In the beginning, it was mainly a series of take-offs on Barry Smith's Conan artwork and on sword-and-sorcery comics in general. But *Cerebus* was possibly the first serious comic-book size competition for newsstand comics in the direct-sales market.

CEREBUS APPEARED a few months before *Elfquest*. Nevertheless, Dave says he owes a debt to Richard and Wendy Pini:

"Until issue 15 or 16 (of *Cerebus*) I was basically just trying to do good comics. Seeing the enormous success of *Elfquest*, I became aware that it was very important to Wendy. It was a story she wanted to tell.

"I started looking at *Cerebus* and saying, 'What do I want to say with it?' — which changed the book from a sword-and-sorcery pastiche to the statement of political or social values or the basic quest for truth, moving comics away from adolescent power fantasies.

"I DON'T READ a lot of comics. I try to read what is considered the world's great literature. You find basic themes: politics, religion, how men and women relate. Those are the kind of things I'm trying to explore in *Cerebus*.

"You can build a constituency of just 20,000 people; you're not as accountable to the marketplace as other media are.

"It would be tragic if that kind of medium weren't able to broaden its horizons so someone could come along and say, 'This is a pretty esoteric idea; I don't know how many comics fans are interested, but I'll be content with being able to say it to 5,000 very interested people.'"

CEREBUS'S "CONSTITUENCY" has grown steadily. Print-run for the first issue was 2,000; for the latest (#56, as of this writing), 20,000. Dave and Deni announced their marriage between issues 6 and 7; they announced their separation in #55. But Deni says their differences are personal, not professional, and Aardvark-Vanaheim goes on.

In addition to *Cerebus*, which became a monthly with #14, the line has expanded to include Arn Saba's *Neil the Horse*, Bill Loeb's *Journey* and Valentino's *Normal-Man*.

Dave is working on his second deck of Cerebus-inspired playing cards. He's writing commentary for a series of reprint anthologies, and his Cerebus art portfolio is a sort of pilot for what he hopes could become a short animated film.

HE'S EVEN WORKING on a color Cerebus story for Marvel's *Epic* magazine. Dave says it could lead to a second Cerebus comic — in color.

Above all, though, he's committed to telling Cerebus's life-story, month after month, until just after the turn of the millenium.

"I will have traced maybe 20 years of the character's life, finishing with his death in the final issue, because I believe there's a need for a more naturalistic comic book."

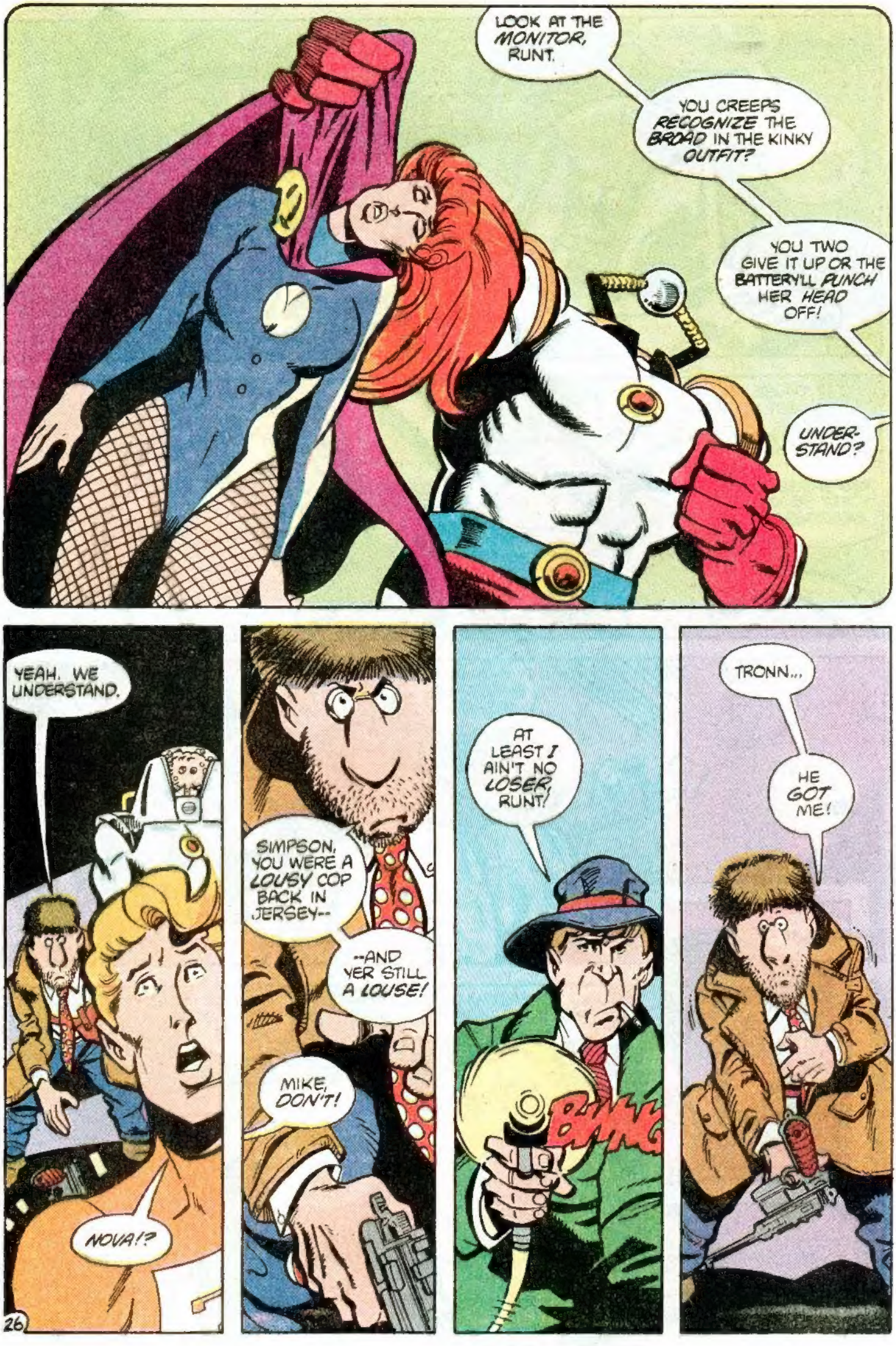
Funny that a sword-wielding aardvark could usher in an era of "more naturalistic" comics. But that could be Cerebus's lot in the history of independent comics.

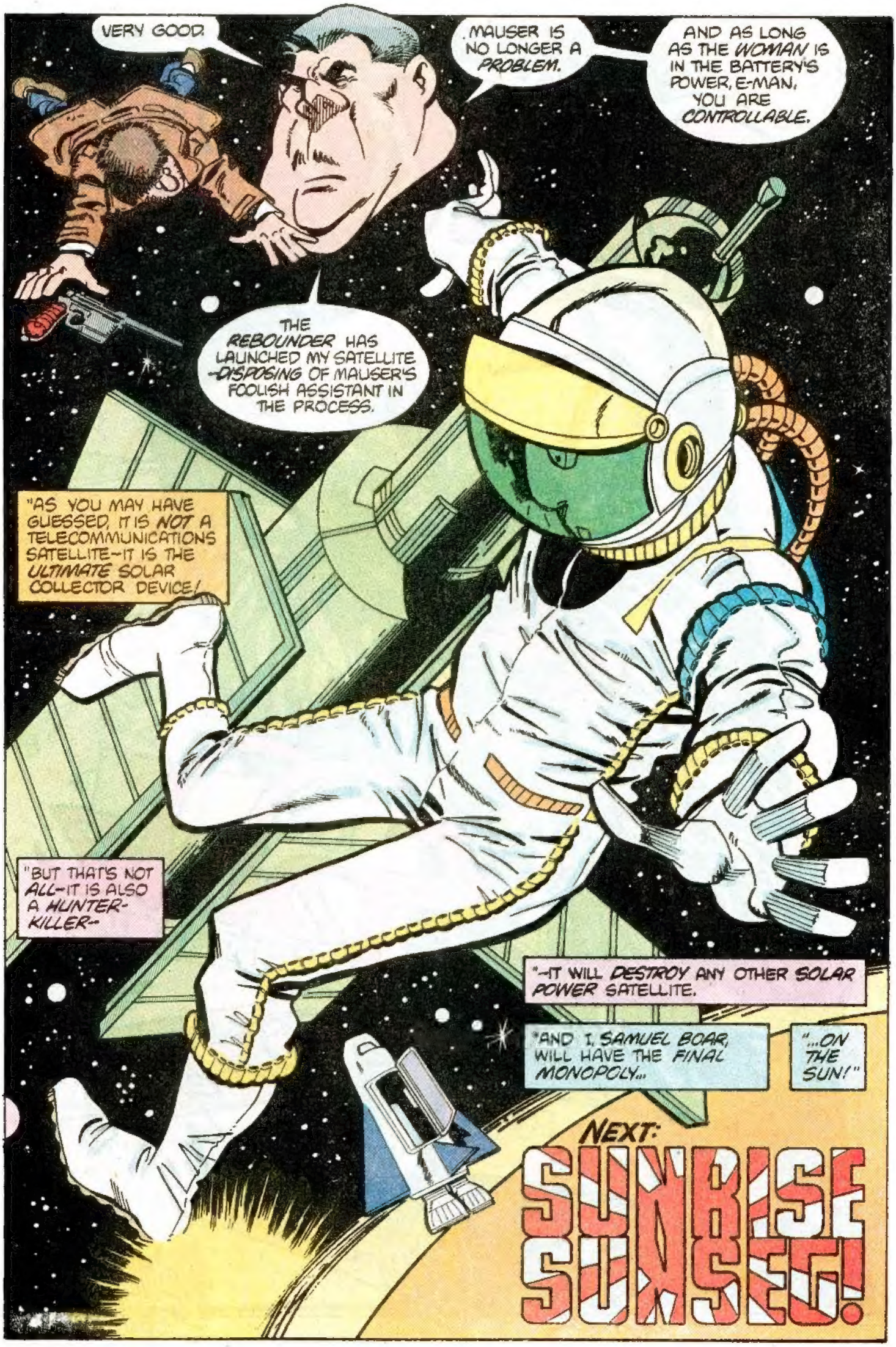
(Charlie Meyerson reports the news weekdays on WXRT Radio (93.1 FM) in Chicago.)

YOWP!
THIS IS GETTING A LITTLE HARD TO HANDLE!
BFFT!
BFFT!
BZZT!
LEMME DOWN, SPAGHETTI-HEAD!
UNGH! THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND!
WHUDD!
SO, YOU HAVE BECOME A SPONGE TO ABSORB ENERGY...
BUT I KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SPONGE TAKES IN MORE THAN IT CAN HOLD!
GOT GRAVEL UP MY NOSE! HARD TO BREATHE!
SNNT SNNT
WAITAM NNIT! THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA-

I'M FREEZING! WHERE AM I?
UH-OH. I DON'T THINK I LIKE THIS!
I'M IN THE SHUTTLE'S CARGO HOLD!
WHUF! GETTING HARD TO BREATHE!
HEY, THAT MODULE!
SPACE SUITS
test unit
AIR'S ALMOST GONE!
GOTTA GET INTO...THE SUIT...
WHEW! NOW I CAN BREATHE— BUT WHAT NOW?
HOW DO I GET OUTTA HERE?
MAMA!

HEY, BUBBLE-BRAIN!
YOU SMELL AWFUL!
'CAUSE YOU AIN'T GOT NO NOSE!
SO THIS GADGET'S GOTTA BE YER BREATHER!
THIS IS BECOMING TEDIOUS!
YOUR ANTICS ARE FUTILE!
BOAR!
AND SIMPSON—WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' HERE?
HOW YA' DOIN', RUNT?
I'M MR. BOAR'S SECURITY CHIEF THESE DAYS.


LOOK AT THE MONITOR, RUNT.
YOU CREEPS RECOGNIZE THE BROAD IN THE KINKY OUTFIT?
YOU TWO GIVE IT UP OR THE BATTERY'LL PUNCH HER HEAD OFF!
UNDER-STAND?
YEAH. WE UNDERSTAND.
NOVA!?
SIMPSON, YOU WERE A LOUSY COP BACK IN JERSEY--
--AND YER STILL A LOUSE!
MIKE, DON'T!
AT LEAST I AIN'T NO LOSER, RUNT!
BANG
TRONN...
HE GOT ME!


VERY GOOD.
MAUSER IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM.
AND AS LONG AS THE WOMAN IS IN THE BATTERY'S POWER, E-MAN, YOU ARE CONTROLLABLE.
THE REBOUNDER HAS LAUNCHED MY SATELLITE -DISPOSING OF MAUSER'S FOOLISH ASSISTANT IN THE PROCESS.
"AS YOU MAY HAVE GUESSED, IT IS NOT A TELECOMMUNICATIONS SATELLITE--IT IS THE ULTIMATE SOLAR COLLECTOR DEVICE!
"BUT THAT'S NOT ALL--IT IS ALSO A HUNTER-KILLER--
"--IT WILL DESTROY ANY OTHER SOLAR POWER SATELLITE.
"AND I, SAMUEL BOAR, WILL HAVE THE FINAL MONOPOLY...
"...ON THE SUN!"
NEXT:
SUNRISE SUNSET!